

# Some Reflections on the Principle of Unity/Oneness

Hooshmand Badee

## Introduction

The year 2017 is an exciting time for Bahá'ís because the Bahá'í world community is celebrating the global commemoration of the Bicentennial Birth of Bahá'u'lláh. There are two main reasons for celebration. Bahá'u'lláh is the latest representative of God for reconnecting the humanity to an unknowable God, and this need to be celebrated. Also, the message of Bahá'u'lláh is to unite the entire humanity, a vision prophesied by preceding dispensations, and this is worthy of celebration. Bahá'u'lláh's mission is to create a global society that is based on unity and love rather than factors such as economic and political gains. Bahá'u'lláh is the prophet of unity and a gift of God to the humanity, which should be welcomed. Humanity, according to the Universal House of Justice should, '...seize this opportunity to find out who He was and what He represents.'<sup>1</sup> This paper, briefly, reflects on the message of Bahá'u'lláh, creating the oneness of humanity.

## Creating Unity/Oneness is the Main Reason for the Coming of Bahá'u'lláh

Oneness is such an important principle that we can call the Bahá'í Faith a religion of oneness. Oneness, according to the Universal House of Justice is '...at once the operating principle and the

ultimate goal of His [Bahá'u'lláh] Revelation...'<sup>2</sup> According to Bahá'u'lláh's admonitions:

*We have created you all from one same substance it is incumbent on you to be even as one soul, to walk with the same feet, eat with the same mouth and dwell in the same land, that from your inmost being, by your deeds and actions, the signs of oneness and the essence of detachment may be made manifest. [HW Ar. #68]*

The principle of oneness according to Shoghi Effendi is '...the pivot round which all the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh revolve.' [WOB 42] He further states:

*The principle of the oneness of mankind ... is no mere outburst of ignorant emotionalism or an expression of vague and pious hope... The principle of the oneness of mankind, as proclaimed by Bahá'u'lláh, carries with it no more and no less than a solemn assertion that attainment to this final stage in this stupendous evolution is not only necessary but inevitable, that its realization is fast approaching, and that nothing short of a power that is born of God can succeed in establishing it. [WOB 42]*

The Universal House of Justice in *The Promise of World Peace* confirms that:

World order can be founded only on an unshakable consciousness of the oneness of mankind, a spiritual truth which all the human sciences confirm... Acceptance of the oneness of mankind is the first fundamental prerequisite for reorganization and administration of the world as one country, the home of humankind.<sup>3</sup>

These and numerous other writings about the consciousness of the oneness indicates that its promotion is the object of life for every Bahá'í. Likewise, as the Universal House of Justice puts, humanity should seize the opportunity and find out who is Bahá'u'lláh and what is His message.

Although the term oneness is used frequently in the Bahá'í writings and we are familiar with the term, it is not easy to define, because in order to define it we have to consider several parts of it, and once we break it into several parts, according to Bahá'í scholar Alimorad Davoodi, it is no more oneness. Therefore, the only definition about oneness according to him is that it is ONE<sup>4</sup>, and this is the definition written in most popular dictionaries.<sup>5</sup> Maintaining this view, Davoodi states, 'Although the word oneness cannot be defined we can sense it.'<sup>6</sup> As Bahá'ís we are used to the concept of oneness, we are associated with the spirit of it and we can have a sense of it. If we ask any Bahá'í, anywhere in the world about the main goal of the Bahá'í Faith, the answer in most cases and perhaps all the time would be just one word: unity/ oneness.

To Bahá'ís, the principle of unity is the distinguishing characteristic of an approach to an ideal global society. Bahá'u'lláh's statement that '*The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens*' [GWB 248], or '*The tabernacle of unity hath been raised; regard ye not one another as strangers*' [GWB 218], are clearly in line with the recognition of the entire world as one community. This goal is possible because, at this time, the means to attain unity are to hand. For example, the revolutionary and world-embracing means of global interrelatedness such as communication, transportation, information technology and global financial interdependency are available as methods of unifying the nations. 'Abdu'l-Bahá explains that '*In cycles gone by, though harmony was established, yet, owing to the absence of means, the unity of mankind could not have been achieved*' [SWAB 31]. This is because means of coming into contact, which is currently available, were not within reach during the past dispensation, thus, '*... association and interchange of thought were well-nigh impossible*' [SWAB 31]. With reference to these passages, we can list three features of an ideal global society: oneness, association, and interchange of thoughts, which could be understood, appreciated and promoted through advanced information and technology.

On a more encouraging and promising condition, humanity has realised the need for having unity of people and nations. In other words, the concept has been recognized. The fact that we are having so many international conferences organized by the United Nations and governments, to discuss issues related to the humanity, is because

we have understood that it is not possible to live in isolation. We are dependent on each other. It is realized that we are living in an age that oneness of mankind is not an option, it is a necessary condition for survival. A significant subject pertinent to unity/oneness that has been discussed by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is the interdependence of people and nations. Frequently He emphasises that *‘all the members of the human family, whether peoples or governments, cities or villages, have become increasingly interdependent’* [SWAB 31-32]. And in a stronger statement He said, *‘For none is self-sufficiency any longer possible, inasmuch as political ties unite all peoples and nations, and the bonds of trade and industry, of agriculture and education, are being strengthened every day’* [SWAB 32]. Although, the need for having unity is recognized, humanity is struggling to form an ideal and meaningful society on the foundation of love and unity.

The two words of unity and oneness, although are used interchangeably in many cases, they are not the same. For example, in the following passage ‘Abdu’l-Bahá states the means for achieving the world of oneness:

*Now is the time for the lovers of God to raise high the banners of unity, to intone, in the assemblages of the world, the verses of friendship and love and to demonstrate to all that the grace of God is one. Thus, will the tabernacles of holiness be upraised on the summits of the earth, gathering all peoples into the protective shadow of the World of Oneness.*  
[SWAB 20]

Shoghi Effendi stated:

World unity is the goal towards which a harassed humanity is striving. Nation-building has come to an end. The anarchy inherent in state sovereignty is moving towards a climax. A world, growing to maturity, must abandon this fetish, recognize the oneness and wholeness of human relationships, and establish once for all the machinery that can best incarnate this fundamental principle of its life. [WOB 163-164]

In the following section a contrast is made between unity and oneness.

Unity can be achieved through various processes, for example, decision making through a process of a democratic and consultative method. Oneness, on the other hand, is the product or the outcome of such unity. Also, in unity, people gather together for a common interest such as discussing environmental issues, or issues related to refugee's crisis, or elimination of poverty. These events and activities are processes of integration that if done properly and sincerely leads to unity of thoughts and strengthening oneness of humanity.

One might see unity as a temporary connection based on a common interest in a group; oneness is an actual integration of the whole. In other words, the term unity suggests the idea of a group of individuals coming together for a common goal. A group may think alike, however, they are each different in personality and character. Oneness is created when the group integrated with a spirit of love, fellowship and unity. It is in that moment that there is no other identity other than a condition that they are all ONE in spirit.

Unity should be the vision at the start of any activity, with the aim to finish it with oneness. This is a big challenge as many activities with good intention result in failure. The absence of clear planning, lack of resources including human, physical and financial are some of the challenges that may exist in strengthening oneness.

Unity is the catalyst, or a bridge to strengthen oneness. Numerous examples are stated in the Bahá'í writings that are the catalyst to achieve oneness. These include an independent investigation of truth; equality of women and men; an auxiliary universal language, universal and compulsory education; Bahá'í marriage, a universal single currency.

Unity is the means that leads to transformation of human relationship and ends with the oneness. Oneness of humankind according to the Universal House of Justice '...holds far-reaching implications for the life of the individual and for the betterment of the world.'<sup>7</sup> Bahá'u'lláh clearly raise a genuine question, '*...is not the object of every Revelation to effect a transformation in the whole character of mankind, a transformation that shall manifest itself, both outwardly and inwardly, that shall affect both its inner life and external conditions? For if the character of mankind be not changed,*

*the futility of God's universal Manifestation would be apparent'* [KI 240-241].

All events and activities should have sufficient follow-up that gives an opportunity for oneness to develop. For an effective relationship between all participants in a community, morality becomes a key principle for its operation. Interrelationship should allow individual core values to reach and affect the wider society. 'Abdu'l-Bahá states:

*The more this interrelationship is strengthened and expanded, the more will human society advance in progress and prosperity. Indeed, without these vital ties it would be wholly impossible for the world of humanity to attain true felicity and success.*<sup>8</sup>

## **Some Examples of Bahá'í Teachings as Catalysts for Strengthening Oneness**

### **Independent Investigation of Truth**

The Religious priesthood is one of the reasons for serious conflicts and disunity among peoples and nations of the world and among different religious denominations. The Founder of the Bahá'í Faith has removed the religious priesthood from the Bahá'í community forever, and the responsibility of the affairs of the Bahá'í community is invested in the Bahá'í administrative order. The absence of religious priesthood suggests that each Bahá'í has the responsibility and attitude of independent investigation of truth. This is a principle that when practised by the followers of all Faiths leads to the realisation that the true spirit of all Faiths is one. The Bahá'í Writings confirm this view, Bahá'u'lláh said:

*...as these Birds of the Celestial Throne [Manifestations of God] are all sent down from the heaven of the Will of God, and as they all arise to proclaim His Irresistible Faith, they, therefore, are regarded as one soul and the same person. For they all drink from the one Cup of the love of God, and all partake of the fruit of the same Tree of Oneness.* [KI 37]

Elsewhere He said, ‘Purge thy sight, therefore, from all earthly limitations, that thou mayest behold them all as the bearers of one Name, the exponents of one Cause, the manifestations of one Self, and the revellers of one Truth...’ [KI 39]. And ‘Abdu’l-Bahá states that ‘...the oneness of the kingdom of humanity, which is the essence of the teachings of all the Manifestations of God...’ [PUP 11-12].

The vision and central objective of every revelation have been the consciousness of the spirit of oneness and it came in stages of unity as a goal. Confirming this Bahá’u’lláh states, ‘*The fundamental purpose animating the Faith of God and His Religion is to safeguard the interests and promote the unity of the human race...*’ [GWB 215]. He also said, ‘*The prophets of God should be regarded as physicians whose task is to foster the well-being of the world and its peoples, that, through the spirit of oneness, they may heal the sickness of a divided humanity*’ [GWB 79]. According to historian Joseph Kitagawa (1990) in the *Quest for Human Unity*, ‘...ideas of the oneness of a globally united humanity have a rich and varied history, reaching back to antiquity.’<sup>9</sup> The Holy Scriptures are in agreement about the fundamental principle of oneness. The diversity of religions, however, is due to external condition and the timing of each Revelation. There can be unity in each Faith or within each denomination. But oneness is created when all become *one* under the banner of *one* God and *one* Faith. The messengers of God are different individuals; however, they are *one* in spirit. Bahá’u’lláh said:

*These Manifestations of God have each a twofold station. One is the station of pure abstraction and essential unity. In this respect, if thou callest them all by one name, and dost ascribe to them the same attribute, thou hast not erred from the truth. Even as He hath revealed: “No distinction do We make between any of His Messengers!” [Qur’án 2:285] For they, one and all summon the people of the earth to acknowledge the Unity of God, and herald unto them the Kawthar of an infinite grace and bounty. They are all invested with the robe of Prophethood, and honored with the mantle of glory. Thus, hath Muhammad, the Point of the Qur’án, revealed: “I am all the Prophets.” Likewise, He saith: “I am the first Adam, Noah, Moses, and Jesus.” Similar statements have been made by ‘Alí. Sayings such as this,*

*which indicate the essential unity of those Exponents of Oneness, have also emanated from the Channels of God's immortal utterance, and the Treasuries of the gems of divine knowledge, and have been recorded in the scriptures. These Countenances are the recipients of the Divine Command, and the daysprings of His Revelation. This Revelation is exalted above the veils of plurality and the exigencies of number. Thus, He saith: "Our Cause is but one" [Qur'án 54:50]. Inasmuch as the Cause is one and the same, the Exponents thereof also must needs be one and the same. [KI 37]*

Thus, an outstanding team-work is recorded in the Holy Scriptures with the messengers of God to create and strengthen the oneness of religions and the creation of oneness of the entire humanity in stages with the unity of tribes, of cities, of a nation, and now of the entire human race.

### **Non-involvement in Partisan Politics**

The Bahá'í writings clearly define religion and politics as two separate spheres of human activity, 'Abdu'l-Bahá states: *'Religion is concerned with things of the spirit, politics with things of the world. Religion has to work with the world of thought, whilst the field of politics lies with the world of external conditions'* [PT 132]. Bahá'ís get distance from any activities that cause disunity. One such activity is involved in party politics and this is perhaps another main reason for serious conflicts and disunity in a society. Disunity weakens the degree of oneness. Bahá'ís are, therefore, instructed to apply the non-involvement in partisan politics. The Universal House of Justice states:

When Bahá'u'lláh proclaimed His Message to the world in the nineteenth century He made it abundantly clear that the first step essential for the peace and progress of mankind was its unification.<sup>10</sup>

'Abdu'l-Bahá explains the rationale of non-involvement in political activities:



*If a Bahá'í were to insist on his right to support a certain political party he could not deny the same degree of freedom to other believers. This would mean that within the ranks of the Faith, whose primary mission is to unite all men as one great family under God, there would be Bahá'ís opposed to each other. Where, then, would be the example of unity and harmony which the world is seeking?*<sup>11</sup>

The Universal House of Justice in the Ridvan message 2017 states:

Shoghi Effendi warned too against having any share in political controversies, entanglements, and bickerings. “Let them rise above all particularism and partisanship,” he urged on another occasion, “above the vain disputes, the petty calculations, the transient passions that agitate the face, and engage the attention, of a changing world.” These are the inevitable foam and spray cast up as wave after wave convulses a turbulent and divided society.<sup>12</sup>

Therefore, Bahá'í understanding is that partisanship can never build unity among all people, and choosing one side or another in the partisan political divisions will only lead to separation, disintegration and disunity, and weaken the oneness. However, if politics, not defining as partisan politics, but defining by its universal way of thinking which is to have programs for the wellbeing and prosperity and happiness of an entire population, then without any exaggeration, Bahá'u'lláh created a universal political enterprise. He created the greatest social-political and spiritual revolution of all times. Bahá'u'lláh is a spiritual revolutionary.

## **The Bahá'í Covenant**

The covenant is a guarantee for sustainability of unity in the Bahá'í community and a vital means to achieve the end result of oneness. Bahá'ís believe that the distinctive unity of the Bahá'í Faith stems from a promise from God to humanity that assures His continuing guidance after the passing of Bahá'u'lláh. The promise is referred to as the covenant (*Ahd va Mithág*). Bahá'u'lláh, in His ‘Will’, the “Book of Covenant” (*Kitáb-i-Ahd*), appointed His son, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, as his successor and the interpreter of his writings, and

the centre of His covenant. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, also in his “Will and Testament” (*Alváh-i-Vasáyá*) appointed his grandson, Shoghi Effendi, as his successor, the interpreter of the scriptures, and the guardian of the Faith. Thus, there is a clear authoritative interpretation of Bahá’í Holy Scriptures. According to this covenant, the Universal House of Justice is the supreme governing body of the Bahá’í Faith (the Guardian and the House of Justice were the twin successors of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá). When the Universal House of Justice sends a message, the entire Bahá’í community unitedly receives their loving, affectionate and caring guidance and put it into practice full heartedly. Bahá’ís are, therefore, united because they follow the same scriptures and authority.

The organization of the Bahá’í Faith and its administrative institutions are such that do not allow the creation of sects, branches or denominations. This requires the establishment of a strong relationship between the central figures of the Bahá’í Faith and the believers. The House of Justice describes the Covenant as ‘...an institution which protects the Cause from individuals who, through the assertion of their own wills, would try to force God’s Cause into the paths of their own preference and thus divide the Faithful and subvert the world-wide establishment of divine justice.’<sup>13</sup>

It is through the Bahá’í covenant that a network of local, national and international institutions operates in harmony throughout the world. Considering that the Bahá’ís live in more than one hundred thousand localities worldwide, embracing the culture of unity affects the Bahá’í community directly, and indirectly affects the flow of strengthening oneness.

## **The Institution of Bahá’í Marriage**

Bahá’í marriage is a principle that helps maintain unity between two people with an effect of creating and strengthening the spirit of oneness. Separation of people weakens the oneness and unity adds to the strength of oneness. The Bahá’í writings consider the family as the basic unit of society. Unless this all-important building block is healthy and cohesive, society cannot be healthy and unified. The foundation of a successful and healthy family is the preparation for a union as an essential element of a happy marriage. Bahá’u’lláh said

marriage is '*...a fortress for well-being and salvation*' [KA note 88]. He, not only permits but also keenly encourages Bahá'ís to marry with people of any belief or cultural, ethnic and racial background, and with no consideration of social class or wealth. Marriage is to ensure not only unity between the couple but also between the two families, and even different communities and cultures, such as in mixed marriages. These are the means and processes of unity that add to end result of oneness. 'Abdu'l-Bahá states: '*...the foundation of the Kingdom of God is based upon harmony and love, oneness, relationship and union, not upon differences, especially between husband and wife.*'<sup>14</sup>

Mixed marriages between different cultures, although challenging in some ways, enable individuals and families to learn and respect each other's cultures, a phenomenon that would have an effect on the strength of oneness. Other positive effects of mixed marriages are the potential to remove national, cultural and religious barriers in the long run and improve communication between the parties. Children raised in such families develop a broader view of the world, with a positive attitude of respect and effective communication with different cultures. Once again, these are the means and the process of achieving oneness.

Within the Bahá'í community, much importance is placed on consolidating the concept of family and its relationship with those outside of the family unit. Moral education and a better understanding of the significance of marriage and family life helps pave the way. Morality is an essential part of the Bahá'í culture, which defines the relationship between an individual and the whole society, and Bahá'í parents and the Bahá'í community endeavour to teach moral values to children. As a result, those values become an intrinsic part of the individual and the life of the society. In a number of places, the Bahá'í Writings use the analogy of family to confirm that human beings are members of a big family. 'Abdu'l-Bahá states: '*...we are all inhabiting one globe of the earth. In reality, we are one family and each one of us is a member of this family. We must all be in the greatest happiness and comfort*' [FWU 41]. As a result of practising the features of a family in the wider society, it becomes a natural and normal way of life to respect and care for

fellow human beings and the creation of a new generation to work towards creating oneness.

## The Institution of the Bahá'í House of Worship

A significant aspect of Bahá'í House of worship is that it is the practical demonstration of the oneness of religions. 'The Mashriq'l-Adhkár, described by 'Abdu'l-Bahá as:

*...one of the most vital institutions of the world', weds two essential, inseparable aspects of Bahá'í life: worship and service. The union of these two is also reflected in the coherence that exists among the community-building features of the particularly the burgeoning of a devotional spirit that finds expression in gatherings for prayer and an educational process that builds capacity for service to humanity.<sup>15</sup>*

These Houses of worship are unique places which welcome members of all Faiths 'to reunite' them. A letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi states, 'The oneness of mankind implies the achievement of a dynamic coherence between the spiritual and practical requirements of life on earth. The indispensability of this coherence is unmistakably illustrated in his ordination of the Mashriq'l-Adhkár, the spiritual center of every Bahá'í community' [MA 23-24]. Hence, Bahá'í House of Worship is an ideal place to gather people of all faiths. Apart from the view that Bahá'í House of Worship is a means to celebrate the oneness of religion, these buildings offer humanitarian services to deal with the ills of society. Shoghi Effendi states:

Nothing short of direct and constant interaction between the spiritual forces emanating from this House of Worship centering in the heart of the Mashriq'l-Adhkár, and the energies consciously displayed by those who administer its affairs in their service to humanity can possibly provide the necessary agency capable of removing the ills that have so long and so grievously afflicted humanity. [BA 184]

And the Universal House of Justice states:

It was as if the House of Worship, yet unbuilt, was fulfilling the wishes of the Master, expressed on the eve of the ceremony, for every such edifice: ‘that humanity might find a place of meeting’ and ‘that the proclamation of the oneness of mankind shall go forth from its open courts of holiness.’<sup>16</sup>

Therefore, the reality, structure and function of Houses of Worship are effective means of adding to the strength of the spirit of all Faiths as one reality.

### **The Institution of the Nineteen-Day Feast**

The Nineteen Day Feast is a unique event ordained in the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* by Bahá’u’lláh. He counselled His followers to meet once every Bahá’í month with a vision of the fundamental principle of unity that will diffuse the oneness of mankind, although the methods and approaches adopted in each community may vary. Nineteen Day Feast is demonstrating another means for strengthening the principle of oneness. The holding of these gatherings is to bind hearts together. In appreciation of the purpose of this most important Institution of the Cause ‘Abdu’l-Bahá described the Feast in these terms: ‘This Feast is a bringer of joy. It is the groundwork of agreement and unity. It is the key to affection and fellowship. It diffuseth the oneness of mankind.’<sup>17</sup>

Bahá’ís’ work towards community building starts at the local level, as unity starts at the grassroots through individual efforts, concerted community efforts and the institutions of the Faith. At the core of Bahá’í community life is the Nineteen-Day Feast. The Local Spiritual Assembly has the responsibility of organising these gatherings in their own specific area of jurisdiction. The Nineteen-Day Feast is a good example of the close relationship of the individual, the community and the institutions, where all Bahá’ís in the area, regardless of their socio-economic status and educational achievements gather together to worship, discuss the community’s progress, and consult about possible ways to build the community. The hope of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is that:

*... the Nineteen Day Feast become the cause of great spiritual solidarity between the friends, that it may bring believers*

*into the bond of unity, and we will then be so united together that love and wisdom will spread from this centre to all parts. This Feast is a divine Feast. It is a Lord's supper. It attracts confirmation of God like a magnet. It is the cause of the enlightenment of hearts.*<sup>18</sup>

The holding of thousands of such Feasts around the world with objectives of 'unity in diversity', is a practical way of learning, practising and creating oneness of humanity.

## **Pioneering and Travel Teaching**

According to Moojan Momen, the term *pioneer* is 'used in Bahá'í literature to designate those who leave their homes to settle in another locality with the intention of spreading the Bahá'í Faith or supporting existing Bahá'í communities.'<sup>19</sup> The purpose of spreading the Bahá'í Faith is to unite communities with a vision of establishing oneness of mankind, and pioneering is another means for achieving it. Many communities are suffering from internal crisis and variety of ethnic and cultural and religious difficulties and crying out for unity. Pioneers can perform an important role to reconnect people together in an atmosphere of love and fellowship. Bahá'í Pioneers, by moving away from their homes and live with people of other cultures, eagerly promoting unity and practising 'unity in diversity'. These are the two important requirements of strengthening oneness. The program of pioneering in the last few decades has not only resulted in promoting the Bahá'í Faith in all corners of the globe but has also been working towards removing prejudices, which may otherwise form obstacles towards promoting oneness. Referring to the important role of pioneers, the Universal House of Justice states, 'There is no doubt that the movement of pioneers remains an indispensable feature of the spiritual enterprise in which the community of the Most Great Name is engaged.'<sup>20</sup> Pioneers and travel teachers show in a very practical sense that it is possible to be united while being different. It is important to note that by moving to different countries, Bahá'í pioneers and travel teachers do not intend to change people's traditions and way of life but learn and respect the culture of the community they live.

## Further Reflections on the Principle of Unity/Oneness

One may argue that unity is only possible within the Bahá'í community because all its adherents believe in the same principles and values. An outsider may wonder whether the principle of unity is actualised globally. The Bahá'í believe is that the Bahá'í teachings assert global unity and not only that of the Bahá'í community. This unity, however, starts from within the Bahá'í community (and from the actions of many like-minded people). The Universal House of Justice, in the *Promise of World Peace*, encourage the people of the world to examine the Bahá'í communities around the world as an example of what a united world would look like in the future.<sup>21</sup> It is, of course, naive to think that unity, whether within the Bahá'í community or in the wider society, will be established without any difficulties or complications. Indeed, the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh provide the outline and the driving force for unity, but painstaking efforts are needed at both individual and community levels to achieve it. The Bahá'í institutions at the local, national and international levels help establish and preserve the unity within the Bahá'í community, and work with individuals, organizations and governments, as appropriate, to promote unity outside of the Bahá'í community as well. At the local level, these are achieved through various community and core activities such as observing Bahá'í Holy Days, children's classes, junior youth and youth activities, devotional gatherings and study circles, encouraging women's participation in social and other activities, and Bahá'í summer and winter schools. As a community-building exercise, the general public is actively invited to participate in these activities and to work together with the Bahá'ís to bring about unity. A sense of belonging to the community generates a willingness in people to accept responsibility to help each other and to commit to the development of the whole community. These collective actions can help diminish difficulties within and outside the Bahá'í community.

On the practical level, Bahá'ís associate with people of all backgrounds in their effort to follow Bahá'u'lláh's exhortations, striving to create a society that is based on unity and love of humanity. The concept of 'unity in diversity' is what the Bahá'í writings advocates as a practical demonstration of unity that will

protect oneness from uniformity. Elaborating on this, William Hatcher and Douglas Martin wrote:

We will arrive at unity, but rather by an increased awareness of and respect for the intrinsic value of each separate culture, and indeed, of each individual. It is not diversity itself, which is deemed the cause of conflict, but rather our immature attitude towards it, our intolerance and prejudice.<sup>22</sup>

To attain unity in diversity, consideration is given by the Bahá'í community to teaching the concept of world citizenship as part of the education of every child.

The core principle of unity can be challenged because currently there are many obstacles for the transformation of consciousness, such as doubts, misconceptions, prejudices, suspicions and narrow self-interest. Such challenges require the society to '... change its attitudes before a solution to social problems can be found.'<sup>23</sup> Although there are challenges, the Bahá'í community is in a dynamic state of transformation with a culture of learning and with confident facing challenges. This approach promotes the positive transformation of individuals and families into a new generation. However, it depends on how the Bahá'í community adjusts itself with the challenges of the larger society they are living in it. The Bahá'í writings provide a number of principles that, taken together with a basic spiritual transformation in society, show the pathway for sustainable living and guide communities towards a more sustainable future. One such belief is an understanding of human nature, which encourages us to re-examine who we are and what our purpose in life is? Universal and compulsory education, elimination of all kinds of prejudices, the harmony of science and religion, and independent investigation of truth, Bahá'í method of decision making through the democratic approach of consultation are some of the spiritual principles strongly suggested in the Bahá'í writings as catalyst and processes of strengthening oneness.

Today the effects of the gradual application of the spirit of unity, such as the rejection of racial prejudices, the greater awareness of the need to protect the environment, the recognition of a need for political unity, migration and refugee crisis has led to recognize positive aspects of human potential, recognizing principles of



spirituality to reduce absolute poverty, the acceptance of gender equality in many societies, and the greater awareness of human rights, are apparent in the wider society. The recognition and application of these measures would gradually strengthen the principle of oneness.

---

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Universal House of Justice. Message of 17 October 2017, to all who celebrate the Glory of God.
- <sup>2</sup> Ibid. Message dated 20 October 1983.
- <sup>3</sup> Universal House of Justice, *The Promise of World Peace*, pp. 13-14.
- <sup>4</sup> The word ‘oneness’ translated into English word for ‘one’ is the Greek word, ‘heis’, which means, ‘one.’ It implies being whole or complete. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines the term ‘one’ as follows: Having the value of one – used to refer to a single person or thing.
- <sup>5</sup> The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines unity as follows: “The state of being in full agreement; a way of combining the parts in a work of art or literature so that they seem to belong together.”
- <sup>6</sup> Alimorad Davoodi.
- <sup>7</sup> Universal House of Justice, letter dated 29 January 2014 to the Bahá’í youth in Iran.
- <sup>8</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, quoted in a Compilation on *Huqúqu’lláh*, p. 22.
- <sup>9</sup> Joseph Kitagawa. Quoted in Stephen Lambden, *Bahá’í and Globalization*, ed., p. 17.
- <sup>10</sup> Universal House of Justice. *Wellspring of Guidance*, pp. 131-136.
- <sup>11</sup> Ibid. Messages of the Universal House of Justice 1968 – 1973, pp. 44-50.
- <sup>12</sup> Ibid. Ridván 2017.
- <sup>13</sup> Ibid. Quoted in *Power of the Covenant*, Part Two, Toronto: Bahá’í Canada Publications 1976, p. 17.
- <sup>14</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. A selection of extracts from the Bahá’í writings on family life and marriage, p. 5.
- <sup>15</sup> Universal House of Justice, Ridván 2012.
- <sup>16</sup> Universal House of Justice. Ridván 2012.
- <sup>17</sup> Ibid. Letter to the National Spiritual Assembly of Argentina, 25 July 1984.

- 
- <sup>18</sup> From a talk by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá given at a Nineteen Day Feast in London, England, 29 December 1912, quoted in Bahá’í News Letter, 33 (July 1929), pp. 1-2.
- <sup>19</sup> Moojan Momen. *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, New York: Columbia University, 2013.
- <sup>20</sup> Universal House of Justice. Message of 23 May 2011.
- <sup>21</sup> Cf. *The Promise of World Peace*, part IV: ‘If the Bahá’í experience can contribute in whatever measure to reinforcing hope in the unity of the human race, we are happy to offer it as a model for study.’
- <sup>22</sup> William Hatcher and Douglas Martin. *The Bahá’í Faith*, p. 78.
- <sup>23</sup> Universal House of Justice. Statement dated 27 April 1988.